

welfare eligibility system makes sense. But we are not debating whether or not privatization is a good idea. All we are debating—or at least all we should be debating—is whether Texas should be allowed to explore the options of allowing private contractors to administer a part of the welfare system. It is not possible for anyone to know what impact privatization will have until the bids are submitted. I would say to those who oppose privatization as well as those who support privatization: Let's wait and see what proposals are made for privatization before we jump to a conclusion either way.

Injecting some competition into this process will produce a welfare system that is better for welfare recipients and taxpayers. I would hope that those who oppose privatization will put their energy into improving the current system instead of trying to prevent any competition.

Approving the Texas waiver request does not necessarily mean that Texas will privatize any part of the welfare system. The Federal Government still must approve any contract with a private company before any privatization can become final. We should wait until we see the proposals from private companies before we decide whether or not privatization makes sense. We can't honestly debate the merits of privatization until we know the facts about what privatization will mean.

If the bids by private contractors don't adequately address the concerns that have been raised about the impact that privatization will have on individuals applying for assistance and on the current employees, or if the public sector can demonstrate that they can administer welfare programs more efficiently and effectively than any of the private contractors, I will be the first to argue that we shouldn't go forward with privatization.

I regret that this issue has become so politicized. I would urge all parties involved to cool our rhetoric and try to work together to find a way to allow Texas to explore this option while providing safeguards against the concerns we all share. I know Governor Bush and Commissioner McKinney are committed to finding a constructive solution, and believe that the administration is willing to work with them as well. I hope that they will continue their dialog to find a solution that will allow Texas to move forward with this proposal.

Mr. VENTO. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of the move to make technical corrections to the welfare reform law, H.R. 1048. Although I was hopeful that the measure would include provisions to exempt Hmong veterans from benefit restrictions, I am pleased that the sense of Congress was included in the amendments offered. This sense of Congress would recognize the service of thousands of Hmong and other Highland Lao veterans who fought in special guerrilla units on behalf of the United States during the Vietnam war. I would also state that Congress should approve legislation for the purpose of continuing certain welfare benefits for these Hmong and Highland Lao veterans and their families based on their service to the United States.

I believe that we must go further than this sense of Congress language to recognize the service of the Lao Hmong, however, this is an important step in the process of honoring the sacrifice of the Hmong patriots. The Hmong stood by the United States at a crucial time in our history; now we have an opportunity to repay that loyalty. Many of those who survived and made it to the United States are sepa-

rated from other family members and are having a difficult time adjusting to life here.

I worked to include language in this bill that would make the treatment of Hmong veterans commensurate with that of other aliens who served in United States regular military forces. While this provision was not included, I am encouraged that this sense of Congress has bipartisan support and expresses a shared intent to amend this matter and am hopeful that this issue will be resolved in the near future to avert the August 1997 deadline. The loss of benefits to these legal immigrants that can't pass an English language test is unfair and works a special hardship on the Hmong, refugees and asylees nationally.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased that the House of Representatives approved the passage of H.R. 1048, the Welfare Technical Corrections Act of 1997, which I supported. The bill makes a number of technical corrections to the 104th Congress' historic welfare reform bill.

I want to draw particular attention to section 407 of the bill. This section provides for:

...the sense of the Congress that Hmong and other Highland Lao veterans who fought on behalf of the Armed Forces of the United States during the Vietnam conflict and have lawfully been admitted to the United States for permanent residence should be considered veterans for purposes of continuing certain welfare benefits consistent with the exceptions provided other noncitizen veterans under the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996.

The Hmong share a unique historic link with the United States and our objectives in the Vietnam war. It is because of their valiant service that these people deserve our concentrated attention. I want to thank Human Resources Subcommittee Chairman SHAW, Congressman KLECZKA, Congressman RAMSTAD, and the remaining members of the Ways and Means Committee for including this important language in the bill. I am pleased that my communication with the committee has in some measure contributed to raising awareness about the Hmong and their unique situation.

#### GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. SHAW. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks and include therein extraneous material on H.R. 1048.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Florida?

There was no objection.

Mr. SHAW. Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Florida [Mr. SHAW] that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 1048, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

ADVISING MEMBERSHIP OF ISRAELI PRIME MINISTER NETANYAHU ADDRESS ON HOUSE CABLE TV

(Mr. GILMAN asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. GILMAN. Mr. Speaker, permit me to take this opportunity to inform my colleagues of arrangements I have made for them to be able to view a major speech of Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu on House cable channel 25.

Recently the Israeli Prime Minister addressed the membership of Voices United for Israel, an organization dedicated to a secure Israel, comprised of more than 200 Christian and Jewish organizations representing 40 million people across our Nation. Based on the attendance of that event, it is obvious that support for a strong United States-Israeli relationship can be found throughout our Nation.

Accordingly, I have arranged for the Prime Minister's remarks to be broadcast on our House cable channeling, channel 25, this Wednesday, April 30, and Thursday, May 1, at both 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. on both days, and have sent out a "Dear Colleague" letter to each Member of the House advising them of this event.

Mr. Speaker, I hope our Members and their staff will take the opportunity to view this important speech. It was well received and I highly recommend it.

#### EXPIRING CONSERVATION RESERVE PROGRAM CONTRACTS

Mr. SMITH of Oregon. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 1342) to provide for a 1-year enrollment in the conservation reserve of land covered by expiring conservation reserve program contracts, as amended.

The Clerk read as follows:

H.R. 1342

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

#### SECTION 1. ONE-YEAR ENROLLMENT OF LAND COVERED BY EXPIRING CONSERVATION RESERVE PROGRAM CONTRACTS.

(a) ELIGIBLE FARM LANDS.—This section applies with respect to a farm containing land covered by a conservation reserve program contract expiring during fiscal year 1997 if—

(1) the farm had a crop acreage base for wheat, oats, or barley at the time the conservation reserve program contract was executed;

(2) the farm is located in an area in which fall-seeded crops are regularly planted, as determined by the Secretary of Agriculture;

(3) the owner of the farm (or the operator with the consent of the owner) submitted, during the enrollment period that ended on March 28, 1997, an eligible bid to enroll all or part of the land covered by the expiring contract in the conservation reserve established under subchapter B of chapter 1 of subtitle D of title XII of the Food Security Act of 1985 (16 U.S.C. 3831 et seq.); and

(4) the land designated in the bid satisfies the eligibility criteria in effect for enrollment of land in the conservation reserve.